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ABSTRACT

The paper describes classroom life for physically disabled pupils in the Federal Republic of Germany. Goals address maximum independent functioning and the foundations of cultural techniques (reading and writing). The learning of increasingly abstract representations of objects, situations, and actions is seen as a preliminary step to the acquisition of reading and writing. An experience-based approach, in which everyday reality is called into play, is favored as a teaching method. Motivational aspects of such an approach are considered. (CL)

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Paper presented at the 9 th ATEE - Conference

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"EVERY DAY LEARNING" IN A CLASS OF PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED FIRST GRADERS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE TEACHER TO USE HIS FULL SCOPE

Physically handicapped children in the Federal Republic of Germany are normally obliged to attend school. In Baden-Wuertemberg (all further remarks refer to circumstances in this state) physically handicapped children, after their special schooling needs have been determined, are placed in those schools which will satisfy their particular needs. Up to now clear curricular guidelines have not been available for such schools which have been designated as "a realizable form of rehabilitation for the physically handicapped " (Schoenberger 1974, 232). The teacher must then, according to the capabilities of each child, orient himself to the curriculum of the primary schools, schools for learning disabilities or schools for the mentally handicapped.

Schools for the physically handicapped pursue however, just as every other school within the framework of its general educational and cultural tasks pursues, the goal of preparing children for life in our society. These thoughts naturally contain for both parents and teachers the justifiable demand that cultural techniques also be made available to physically handicapped children. In this way it is easily overlooked that the total development and the developmental possibilities of physically handicapped children are seldom comparable to the normal development of non-handicapped children. As a result of their motor impairment there are various effects on the psychomotor, emotional, social-communicative and cognitive development, so that at the time they start school they are very often lacking the developmental prerequisites for a significant acquisition of cultural techniques.

If, as can be everywhere observed, the transmission of cultural techniques is too "directly" sought after, that is, without a detailed and concrete consideration for the developmental retardedness and gaps; there is then the danger of producing a meaningless training-result. Thus it is possible to succeed in conditioning "reading", but, however, the meaning as well as the motivation for use in daily life does not occur.

Freedom to Act for the Teacher

As a result of the fact that the teaching in schools for the physically handicapped is still based on the curriculum of general schools (compare Empfehlungen für den Unterricht in der Schule für Körperbehinderte (Sonderschule) 1984, 9) there exists for the teacher clear freedom to act: he examines through diagnostic methods the learning requirements and needs of the pupils and decides which teaching areas will satisfy these.

The lengthening of the primary school period for physically handicapped children by one year (compare Schulgesetz für Baden-Wuerttemberg in der Fassung vom 1. August, 1983) amounts to a recognition on the governmental side that special encouragement for physically handicapped beginners represents a necessity. This has become, over the years, an approved procedure for the beginning stages of such pupils. Besides a time extension, there arises as a result of this, more freedom of action for the teacher of physically handicapped children.

An essential goal of teaching in schools for the physically handicapped is for the pupils to approach as far as possible an independent mastering of daily life (compare Empfehlungen für den Unterricht in der Schule für Körperbehinderte (Sonderschule) 1984, 9). There then arises further freedom for the teacher, for what is then more obvious than making feasible this mastery of daily life, or as I call it, everyday learning, through a special method of teaching and this not lastly because of the intensified problematics of transferal (compare Gage/Berliner 1975; Schoenberger 1982). For our context the results of transference

research is meaningful because the transferal achievements of those learning are only to be expected by an extensive affinity to learning and practical situations. Justifiable is the hypothesis that the span between learning and practical situations with the target group of physically handicapped children, with regard to their, on the whole, limited learning prerequisites, must be, if at all possible, minimal if any sort of learning effects are to be expected. This means that learning, especially for beginners, must occur in concrete actions which are connected to everyday reality. Therefore, optimal learning situations and tasks can be effective when they correspond to practical situations in their entirety. The great amount of individual differences in the learning capabilities of physically handicapped children and their difficult or not at all foreseeable actions in and reactions to the teaching process suggest an alternative course for teaching preparations and planning (compare Schoenberger 1982, 130). An acquisition of everyday learning, which is to be understood as "the result of practical actions in daily life" (Aebli, 1983), is only significant when used with teaching media which come from the child's world of experience; that is real objects from this world (compare Schoenberger 1982, 136 ff., 155).

The Fixation of Parents and Teachers with the Practice of Cultural Techniques.

Now, however, the incorporation in teaching of materials from daily life encounters an expectation which affects the above mentioned freedom of teacher and can impede his work because it is too directly preoccupied with cultural techniques.

To begin with we can suppose that parents and teachers have at their disposal fairly similar scholastic experiences in socialization. Equally to be supposed is that predominantly receptive treatment of information and teacher-concentrated instruction prevailed within the frame of this scholastic socialization. The contents of this scholastic education primarily shaped the cultural techniques. As a result, the idea that the standard

functions of the school is to transmit cultural techniques is firmly anchored within the thinking of parents and teachers. For non-handicapped children it is possible to directly acquire these skills without too much learning difficulty. Often even teachers lack the insight that physically handicapped children must first learn the pracitce of much simpler actions before they can take any significant steps in the direction of these cultural techniques. The emphasis in special education teacher training is still placed on theory, which makes it rather difficult for them to attain a concrete child-oriented approach to their pupils. The latter is what the physically handicapped child still needs much more than the non-handicapped child. But apart from this fact, it appears that this sustained and active product of personal scholastic socialization obstructs the view of what is actually a simpe state of affairs: Every spontaneous, obvious and observable action of the small non-handicapped child contains elements of the provisions for the later acquisition of reading and writing. I would like to show this through what are typical and well known actions of younger children, namely the taking out, rearranging and putting away of objects.

At first these spatial activities are imitations of the actions which the child's family or guardians normally carry out and through whom his/her environment is developed (compare Piaget 1975, 23 - 105). At the same time, however, s/he forms different methods of ordering when s/he puts dishes, books and other available objects next to each other in cupboards; lays cutlery in to compartments which are next to each other, and then finally when the child acts in a similar manner with his/her own toys in symbolic play (compare Piaget/Inhelder and others 1975, 110 ff.). If the child does not have at his/her disposal this concrete experience with ordering, s/he will have difficulty using and mastering abstract rows of symbols which are the basis for reading and writing.

The Consequences of Physical Disabilities on the Requirements for the Learning of Cultural Techniques

Motor deficiencies are detrimental to motional actions (compare Jetter 1979, 200 ff.); this means the existing physical injuries effect a disturbance in the exchange with the environment. This disturbed exchange influences the development of perception and thought structures from the time of earliest childhood.

The majority of relevant structures for the acquisition of the cultural techniques reading and writing lie in the spatial domain (compare Bach 1971, 149 ff.) the body or rather more the functions of the body of the motor handicapped child influence the development of these spatial structures in that, for example, along with other motor injuries, certain early childhood reflexes remain. In the non-handicapped child these reflexes are lost in the process of advancing development.

I have selected one of these pathologically called reflexes (ATNR = asymetrically toned neck reflex) to show how it impedes the preparation for eye-hand coordination, which a non-handicapped child makes use of at approximately 6 months old. This reflex is caused by the turning of the head and effects the stretching of all limbs on that side of the body. The result is the following: the child in question can grasp an object which s/he sees and has aroused his/her interest but only with difficulty because a minimal movement of his/her head disturbes an intentional steering of his/her arm muscles. If the child has grasped the object, s/he is then unable to observe it closely, let alone observe the action s/he makes with the object, for at the time of bending the outstretched arm the face turns involuntarily. The child can act with one hand but this action is deprived of visual control. In that only the result and not the action is directly observable, a reproduction of the act is hardly possible as the child cannot visually record and store, in other words learn, which steps are necessary for the production of this result. At the most such results can be called products of chance.

The discribed reflex occurences do not, however, take place when the child's head remains in a middle position. Should the child actually be in the position to obtain the requirements for the later learning of reading and writing, s/he must first of all, be assisted in learning to avoid this reflex. So that the child can visually learn to control his/her actions it is of prime importance to enable him/her to repeat this experience that s/he act with this particular placement of the head, use both hands and observe his/her actions. Besides certain therapeutical measures the teacher must consistently make sure that the child is supported in the fact that it must keep this placement of the head during certain periods of movement. At first this can only be achieved when someone (therapist, another pupil, etc.) holds the child's head and stops the subsequent movement of it. One can thus assume that besides indispensable therapeutical measures the child will, through this possible method of positive experience, s/he strengthened in his/her efforts to try to hold his/her in this position itself and thus check the reflex. This way grasping and seeing can increasingly be coordinated and manual activities visually controlled.

But if these seemingly simple experiences in the visual and tactile areas do not occur then subsequent complex experiences, which are necessary for the training of the requirements for reading and writing, are only made more difficult. Thus it must be the teacher´s task to help to enable the child concerned to collect, step for step, the experiences for cultural techniques, which are for the non-handicapped child obvious. This is, of course, only realizable if the teacher has already been given during his training sufficient opportunity to acquire theoretical knowledge and an extensive repertoire of practical strategies that he can then successfully make use of in his work of helping the child to advance.

From Real Object to Intersubjective Symbol

According to Bruner´s findings on the development of children´s perceptual function (compare Bruner 1971, 21 ff.) one can view the learning of recognition and the understanding of increasingly abstract forms of representations of objects, situations and actions as the preliminary steps to the learning of reading and writing. In this continuum the following are to be mentioned in this order: real object, real situation, real action

photographic image
drawing
simplified drawing (line drawing)
intersubjective symbol (agreed upon between teacher and pupil)
coded scipt

In my teaching work with physically handicapped children it has proven to be effective and pleasing to the child to try to "bring about" these developmental phases by tieing them into the daily learning. With this method one should take care not to omit a single phase but carefully, in detail and in a sensible connection to the procedures make possible for the child an access to the cultural techniques.

Everyday Learning as a Basis for the Setting Up of the Procedural Requirements for the Cultural Techniques Reading and Writing

Everyday learning is learning a concrete procedural connection to everyday reality. The everyday reality of the beginning physically handicapped pupil, that is the child in his/her early stages, is equal to that of a younger, non-handicapped child who is not yet able to leave home alone. The accessible sphere of experience for the physically handicapped child is defined by his/her possibilities of movement and is at first limited to the domestic area. Primarily this domestic sphere of experience forms the dimensions of the respective framework for everyday learning.

Within the framework of this learning, it is possible to assist the physically handicapped child in all of the developmental areas which suffer from motor impairment. In my opinion the pedagogical task lies therein to ensure this assistence by providing situations which make possible concrete and active experiences in performance. It appears to me then, only through such an acquisition of this sort of basic experience and knowledge will the central goal of a possible independent mastering of everyday life be attainable. To me it seems obvious that especially in the beginning stages of work, where it is effective to "make up for" experiences which are lacking and to improve unadequate learning requirements, that one can "conquer" together, step by step, the sphere of experience of the non-handicapped child with the physically handicapped child.

It is important for motivation and transferal that the interest in everyday situations be strengthened by the fact that they resemble those the child knows from home. Besides this these situations are then meaningful for the child because the contact person s/he trusts does the same actions with the same objects at home. This circumstance causes then both a greater

preparedness to get involved in the situation and the wish to learn to master the situation just as the contact person has.

The second motivational aspect it based on the knowledge that the non-handicapped child learns to effect everyday actions at home through imitation and simple role play. Aside from this it is known that these imitations and role plays merge smoothly when the child helps or takes part in such tasks. The experiences thusly acquired are often bound together with the satisfaction of basic needs as, for example, emotional conferment. The child is then, among other things, interested in appropriating for himself/herself a strategy of action because s/he has the pleasant experience of receiving conferment when s/he has learned something With most children the motivation increases when there is a strategy of action whose mastering directly satisfies a further basic need; namely, for example, in receiving something edible as a result of the action.

Of further relevance to motivation is that everyday learning has similar characteristics to the exercise and functional games of younger non-handicapped children. This comparison is important in connection with the so-called term of "making up for"; because in everyday learning the physically handicapped child can implicitly learn these resulting forms of play which have been closed to him/her. For even these playful expositions with his/her environment required of him/her impossible motional and active accomplishments. Aside from this the physically handicapped child could hardly aim at repeating such accomplishments (see above, p. 4) and it is just through such a repetition that experience and learning are consolidated (compare Piaget 1975, 117 ff.). In actuality, the everyday world, which the physically handicapped child should learn to master becomes a play world through which results a freedom in which the child can experiment. This means that they can, with the certainty that at all times someone is there to help them and without the fear of failure and stress, actively try out strategies of action and build thought structures which are really relevant to everyday life because they

take place in everyday life. In that all children, according to their possibilities, can participate in such happenings, social learning is then, as it were, automatically incorporated into the framework of everyday learning.

Seen in its whole perspective the physically handicapped child can achieve through everyday learning an ever increasing independence and with it self-confidence. From this results, on the one side, an increased preparedness to further the mastering of daily life and on the other hand can reduce at the same time the dependency on outside help.

This knowledge, that the physically handicapped child often as one result of his/her motional impairment lacks the developmental requirements for a significant acquisition of the cultural techniques, has its basis, on the most part, from the findings which Piaget acquired from his voluminous experiments on the sequence of developmental phases of thinking in the child. (It is important to stress here, that Piaget's developmental theory is, on the whole, cognitively centered, but that cognitive capabilities are inseparably interwoven within the complexitiy of the dimensions of personality). These findings are an essential foundation for the work of the teacher who wants to realize everyday learning.

The comparison between continual diagnostic observation and the developmental stages of non-handicapped children makes possible statements about the respective level of development of the physically handicapped child. Derivable principally from the series of developmental stages which the non-handicapped child goes through are further possibilities for the physically handicapped child. The established actual condition of every single child is brought into connection with the steps of development which follow in the developmental stages of the non-handicapped child. As a result, in a double sense, the contents of everyday life must be apparent in the substance of basic experience: Is it possible in this connection with action for all children, according to their own conditions, to actively participate? Does this

association make possible for all children progress in their development?

In that we are especially interested in the cultural techniques reading and writing, we must as a result, examine daily associations to see whether those requirements of perception, orientation and thinking in the spatial domain are demanded as well as promotable in them. An example of this procedure for a single respective child should be mentioned:

First of all, the developmental stages form the framework of orientation for the establishment of each individual actual-condition within the development, which the teacher must again and again determine in order to be able to aid the respective child in his/her potentiability and needs. This child is observed in various situations of problem-solving; for example in the situation where playing in the sandbox, it wants to build a street between two houses for his/her cars. S/he starts to construct it at house A, stops, starts to build it from house B and then leaves the sandbox after this second attempt has failed to produce the goal. If one observes the attempt of the child to solve the problem, one can then conclude that developmentally the child was not in the position to construct the desired connecting street, for his/her attempt at construction could be assigned to a certain stage of development in forming straight lines (compare Piaget/Inhelder and others 1975, 190 ff.). Connected with this stage which should follow in the development of forming straight lines, the child will now in various situations become strengthened in his/her attempt to directly complete possible concrete ways between two points. This represents nothing other than the active motional experience of the construction of straight lines. For further supporting steps the teacher must discover within which daily activities this accomplishment of construction is abstractedly embodied. An example of this is in preparing for a party the child can be given the task of, in decorating a cake, putting pieces of banana between the spaces where banana pieces already lie. After such qualitatively different experiences the child can be stimulated into a renewed attempt at constructing streets. This child has thus in this way completed active experience in the construction of straight lines, without certainly impeding a later process in the learning of writing. In writing the child must be in the position to, with his/her pen, continue a line already started to its endgoal, so that a legible letter exists.

What at the start, for the teacher especially at the beginning stages of school for the physically handicapped, but certainly not just there, is an outline of "elbow-room" becomes filled out with the help of everyday learning and is thus of the greatest possible help to the child.

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